Madagascar

Freedom of the Press

In late 2013, after numerous delays, Madagascar held presidential and parliamentary elections that were generally peaceful and deemed free and fair by observers. The elections marked a major step toward resolving a protracted political crisis that began with a 2009 military coup and the rise of de facto president Andry Rajoelina. The coup led to the dismissal of the parliament, a virtual suspension of the constitution, and the end of any semblance of judicial independence, ushering in a repressive and violent period for the media. Since 2009, the laws protecting freedom of the press have been routinely ignored or selectively applied by the High Authority of the Transition (HAT), Rajoelina's interim government. The press environment remained volatile in 2013, with continued government censorship and some intimidation of journalists and media outlets. However, there was less overall violence against journalists, who were generally able to cover the elections freely in a politically polarized atmosphere.

Defamation is a criminal offense. Although no new high-profile cases were reported in 2013, a number of cases from previous years remained unresolved. In May 2012, two editors from the opposition radio station Free FM—Lalatiana Rakotondrazafy and Fidel Razara Pierre—were charged with defamation after broadcasting reports that implicated media mogul and Rajoelina supporter Mamy Ravatomanga in the illegal trafficking of precious woods. The editors were released after 24 hours in custody, but the HAT threatened to shut down the station. Later in May, thousands of people demonstrated in support of the outlet in a park in Antananarivo, the capital. In June 2012, Free FM was forced to close due to intimidation from the transitional government after it aired a message from mutinous soldiers. Rakotondrazafy and Pierre were convicted in November 2012 and sentenced to three years in prison for allegedly organizing an illegal demonstration in connection with the May protest. The two editors remained free pending an appeal in 2013, and they organized supporters of Free FM into a new political party that participated in the December parliamentary elections. Free FM resumed broadcasting that month.

In August 2013, during the run-up to the presidential election, the Special Commission for Audiovisual Communication, a body within the Ministry of Communication, ordered the closure of Kolo Radio and Television due to "licensing irregularities." Kolo is owned by presidential candidate Hajo Andrianainarivelo, who accused the commission of pursuing a political agenda and silencing rival media outlets in the electoral season. The closure was suspended pending appeal, and the station remained in operation at year's end.

Madagascar does not have a freedom of information law. Despite attempts by several members of the media to formally draft a code of ethics, no such code exists. The Ministry of Communication established an ethics commission for the media in late 2011, but it quickly collapsed. In some cases, media bodies administer their own ethics criteria in lieu of national standards. A number of leading journalists in 2012 launched an open-membership union for the protection of the profession and journalists' interests. During 2013, it actively pressed the regional Southern African Development Community (SADC) and international entities to address the mass closure broadcast outlets under the HAT.

Censorship, harassment, and intimidation continued throughout the media sector in 2013. The transitional government maintained a tight grip on nationwide broadcasting, and radio and television licenses were often suspended arbitrarily. The government commonly justified these suspensions, as well as arrests of journalists, by citing "national security" concerns. None of the approximately 80 radio and television

stations closed after the coup have reopened. Several other media outlets that are either owned by or sympathetic to the opposition have been forced to navigate between self-censorship and the risk of closure. Many television and radio stations have altered their formats, airing live call-in shows to avoid editorial responsibility for the content.

Ahead of the elections, the Ministry of Communication established an "electoral monitoring room" to track media coverage. The media environment was highly polarized, with outlets often representing a political faction. Major political figures own several of the private media outlets. In general, state and privately owned media continued to display bias toward particular candidates, parties, or business interests. In September, the free semiweekly newspaper *Gazetin'ny Fifidianana* was launched specifically to provide election coverage and candidate profiles.

Violence against journalists declined in 2013. In one incident in October, two journalists—Serge Razanaparany of state-owned Télévision Malagasy (TVM) and Radio Nationale Malagasy (RNM) and Jeanette Ravonimbola of privately owned Radio Tsiko Meva Ylang—were detained and their recordings were seized as part of a murder investigation. In the south of the country, widespread insecurity and violence make reporting extremely difficult.

More than 300 radio and television stations were operating in 2013. There are 13 private daily newspapers, and many more that appear less frequently; the number fluctuates due to suspensions. Widespread poverty and illiteracy severely limit the penetration of television, print media, and the internet, making radio by far the most important medium in the country. During the campaign for the 2013 elections, private media groups increased the prices for political advertising threefold.

Only about 2 percent of the population used the internet in 2013, and access was limited mainly to urban areas. There were no reports that the government restricted internet usage or monitored e-mail. Despite the low penetration rate, the internet is seen as an important source of reliable information, as many servers are located outside the country and beyond the reach of the government. Political groups and parties use the internet widely to share opinions and criticize opponents.

2014 Scores

Press Status

Not Free

Press Freedom Score

(0 = best, 100 = worst)

63

Legal Environment

(0 = best, 30 = worst)

20

Political Environment

(0 = best, 40 = worst)

27

Economic Environment

(0 = best, 30 = worst)

16